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JENNINGS: Former President Carter responded sharply today to a statement that President Reagan made during a campaign trip yesterday. Mr. Reagan left an awful lot of

people with the impression that blame for last week's bombing of the embassy in the Beirut should be taken by the Carter administration. Mr. Carter said today that President Reagan's comments were personally insulting, completely false and the president should apologize. Today, at the White House, they said they were not pointing the finger at President Carter and here's Sam Donaldson.

DONALDSON: President Reagan reacted angrily today to a widespread interpretation of his remarks on how curtailed intelligence ability had contributed to the Beirut bombing. PRESIDENT\RONALD\REAGAN: I will answer your questions about the way you have distorted my remarks about the CIA.

DONALDSON: Some news accounts had made it appear the president was blaming past administrations in general for hurting the CIA but other news accounts had made it appear the president was specifically blaming Jimmy Carter and his administration. That was not what the president said, complained White House Press Secretary Larry Speakes. 'The president,' said Speakes, 'was pointing to a decade long trend in the 70s, particularly a climate in Congress withering to intelligence agencies.' Well, here are the president's own words from yesterday. REAGAN: The real protection and where we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years. Before we came here, the effort that somehow to say well, spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agents and we did that to a large extent. Your biggest protection is to, and we're trying to rebuild our intelligence, to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target might be and be prepared for it.

DONALDSON: The White House insists the president was not attempting to shift some of the blame for the bombing to Jimmy Carter. And Vice President Bush said today Mr. Carter's policies were not to blame for the bombing. VICE\PRESIDENT\GEORGE\BUSH: No, I don't believe that, I don't think anyone can say that. But I do believe that there cuts made in the intelligence business that were inappropriate.

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DONALDSON: Democrats point out that shifts in CIA personnel in 1977 were recommended during the Ford administration and that the CIA budget started to rise in 1979, particularly to fight terrorism. The vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee thought the president had learned a lesson from all this.

SEN.\DANIEL\P.\MOYNIHAN (D.-N.Y.): If he could put the matter to rest it would be so much to the interest of the country. We have a bipartisan support for the intelligence community and it is necessary for the nation.

DONALDSON: The president often blames mistakes of the past for things without being anymore specific than that. But since his intention yesterday is now cleared up, it's not Jimmy Carter's fault, the question was asked here again today, who is to blame for the inadequate security in Beirut? And again today, the question went unanswered. Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.